

BRIEFING PAPER FOR THE PRESIDENT'S PRESS CONFERENCE

November 20, 1962

SUBJECT: Aerial Surveillance of Cuba

QUESTION: On what legal justification do we base our present aerial surveillance of Cuba?

CURRENT SITUATION REPORT:

U.S. aerial surveillance of Cuba began some months ago. It was intensified last summer when the Soviet Bloc stepped up its shipments of weapons and military technicians, and aerial surveillance was further intensified when the U.S. observed large offensive weapons in the Soviet shipments to Cuba.

SUGGESTED POINTS IN REPLY:

The Foreign Ministers of the American Republics (except Cuba) meeting at Punta del Este, Uruguay in January unanimously recognized the danger to the Western Hemisphere in the subversive offensive of communist governments, agents and the organizations which they control.

The Foreign Ministers also declared that the situation in Cuba "demands" unceasing vigilance on the part of the member states of the Organization of American States, which shall report to the Council any fact or situation that could endanger the peace and security of the Hemisphere.

When the Foreign Ministers met informally in Washington October 2-3 they observed that "it is desirable to intensify surveillance of the delivery of arms and implements of war and all other items of strategic importance to the communist regime of Cuba, in order to prevent the secret accumulation in the island of arms that can be used for offensive purposes against the Hemisphere."

On October 22, after the surveillance had been stepped up still further, I reported to the people of the United States that Cuba is being transformed urgently into an important strategic base by the presence of large, long-range and clearly offensive weapons of sudden mass destruction. I reported that the weapons already installed, as well as the bases under construction, would be capable of reaching such targets as Washington, D.C., the Panama Canal, Cape Canaveral, Mexico City, and ranging as far north as Hudson's Bay, Canada, and as far South as Lima, Peru. In addition, I noted that jet bombers, capable of carrying nuclear weapons, were being uncased and assembled in Cuba.

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As I pointed out then, this urgent transformation of Cuba into an important strategic base was an explicit threat to the peace and security of all the Americas, in flagrant and deliberate defiance of the Rio Pact of 1947, the traditions of this Nation and Hemisphere, the Joint Resolution of the 87th Congress, the Charter of the United Nations, and my own public warnings to the Soviets on September 4 and 13.

On October 23, the Council of the Organization of American States acting provisionally as Organ of Consultation under the Rio Treaty recommended that member states "take all measures, individually and collectively including the use of armed force, which they may deem necessary to ensure that the Government of Cuba cannot continue to receive from the Sino-Soviet powers military material and related supplies which may threaten the peace and security of the Continent and to prevent the missiles in Cuba with offensive capability from ever becoming an active threat to the peace and security of the Continent."

In the present circumstances, the aerial surveillance of Cuba is an obvious and indispensable one of the measures necessary to carry out that recommendation.